

# **OER Policies in Canada: A POERUP country report**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on the status of OER policies in Canadian government and higher education institutions, consisting of a POERUP (Policies for OER Uptake) Europroject country report on the existence of policy documents designed to support OER in the different provinces and their institutions. With the knowledge that there are not yet any governmental policies to support OER, open textbooks and few related activities in Canada, this report describes initiatives and/or policy statements that are currently being considered—or perhaps even in developmental stages—in higher education institutions and government.

OER are in a gestational period. Only ten years have passed since the term OER was coined in 2002 by UNESCO; however, while this may provide some wiggle room for countries, which have not yet fully involved themselves in or embraced the concept, it does not bear scrutiny by others who are trying to forward the cause or lead the field. The findings of this study suggest that, with some notable exceptions, there are only a few organizations in Canada currently working to develop and establish higher level government policy, standards and protocols related to OER. Canadian institutions are involved in diverse activities centred on the provision of digital resources, but these are not all necessarily OER initiatives.

The importance of policy to support OER at institutional and provincial/federal government levels should not be understated. Although projects related to learning object accessibility and openness in Canada were underway in the 1990s (e.g. Canarie, Industry Canada), a change in federal government at that time brought many of the emerging initiatives to a halt. As education in Canada is solely a provincial responsibility, there is no national department of education and, by association, no federal education policy. This has left Canada alone in the international arena with respect to the development of national educational policies as the only country where such national policy initiatives are not politically possible.

On the other hand, The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, an organization of the 13 provincial/territorial ministries of Education, for the first time brought up the issue of OER at a national meeting as being important for adapting to the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment. They “reaffirmed their commitment to open access to knowledge and education and to the need to adapt teaching and learning practices to the new realities of the information age.” However they did not actively encourage policy development among their members.

This investigation focused on extracting information on activities taking place from within known institutional and private practice. While activity in the OER arena by major educational, provincial and national institutions may appear insignificant, there is a degree of activity and interest at the individual level that is difficult to quantify but has the potential to lay the foundation for mainstream adoption of policy and practice. Ultimately, groundwork is being laid

by at least a few dedicated players in the national OER field. Unfortunately, it remains evident that, Canadian institutions are lagging behind the rest of the world.



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